

The Assimilation of Racial Minorities into Central Eastern European Societies in the 21st Century: Central Eastern and Western Europe in Comparative Perspective

James A. Mitchell*

Professor, Department of Political Science, California State University, Northridge, USA

Multiculturalism in Europe in the New Millennium

If any trend can be confidently associated with 21st century Europe, it is the increasingly multicultural character of its constituent nation-states. The European Union (EU), the embodiment of the continental idea, is comprised of 28 nations, which originally had as their core *raison d'être* a cultural community. Among the defining characteristics of those cultures were shared language, history, traditions, ethnicity and, yes, racial identity.

That reality notwithstanding, European societies initiated a process that has resulted in their demographic transformation. To a considerable degree, European societies can be regarded as agents of their own metamorphoses. Whether intentional or not, one of the effects of European imperial expansion has been the opening of the continent to penetration by peoples from without. This is not to ignore the reverse of that process, efforts on the part of non-Europeans to conquer the continent. The impact of that activity does not begin to approach that which was spurred through European initiative. Whatever its source, the multicultural transformation of European societies has been well underway for quite sometime.

To say that minority peoples in Western Europe coexist uneasily with the majority population is to greatly understate the dimensions of the condition. Nearly every significant indicator of social cohesion indicates that a path toward multiculturalism in Western Europe has been less than smooth. The preponderance of the major cities of the region, where demographic change has been most apparent, has been theaters of inter-group conflict. The early promise of multicultural harmony in Western Europe, in contrast to the American experience across the Atlantic, has given way to mutual recrimination and animosity. The incidence of racial tension will be detailed in the discussion to follow. Suffice it to say though that there has been an alarming rise in xenophobia, discrimination, and acts of violence attributable to social discord throughout Europe. National and multinational efforts are being undertaken to help mend those tears in the societal fabric. Despite these efforts, the impression left on the peoples of the region by these difficulties has probably been indelible.

This study concentrates on the impending emergence of cultural pluralism in the Central/Eastern European region. The flow of "visible minorities" into the region is presently a trickle [1]. The current numbers of visible minorities, people who differ in skin color and other physical characteristics from the majority, are presently too small to provide measurable data for these societies. The migration of visible minorities to the region, combined with the stagnant growth rates of the native population, will likely result in a duplication of the multicultural growth of the Western region.

The question this investigation raises is whether or not there will be a recurrence in Central/Eastern Europe of the racial conflicts that have plagued the West. The view here is that those tensions less likely to recur on the scale of those in evidence in Western Europe. The principal impediment to the recurrence of those conflicts exists

in the norms of behavior presented by the post-cold war international community. Should they recur the magnitude of the problems that are likely to be wrought by them will be considerably greater. This forecast is attributable to several factors. First, for the societies of Central/Eastern Europe, there is a dearth of the economic resources that would enable them to effectively "throw money" at the problems raised by minority discontent. The people most likely to be adversely impacted by the influx of immigrant populations are those that occupy the lower echelons of society. The delivery of material resources to those most affected served to mute the tenor of many of the conflicts that appeared in previous incarnations. Resort to a similar safety valve will be less available for the Central/Eastern region, at least for the short-term. Secondly, when conflict among groups has become manifest in the region in the past, its character has been typically perceived as one of the zero-sum variety. With one group's gain being seen as a concomitant loss for another, the stakes of the conflict have been treated as considerably high indeed. The battles that have been waged [1] consequently, have reflected a winner-take-all mentality. The result has been the evidence of conflict that has risen to the level of atrocity in several notable instances. The terms "ethnic cleansing" and "holocaust" have entered the annals of human history attendant to previous episodes of social unrest among the peoples of the region. Finally, the states of Central/Eastern Europe have had a long history of repression and intolerance for dissent. A governmental framework for the accommodation of demands for the delivery of promised guarantees has not been in evidence. To a considerable extent the time-honored response of those in authority to minority demands has been a reversion to the familiar, repression. Fortunately, for the prospects of majority/minority amity in Central Eastern and Eastern Europe, an international community exists that holds considerable sway on their policy decisions and, that promotes equality of opportunity for all. This investigation was begun in 2002. More than a decade has passed since the initial findings were documented. There have been hopeful and, not so hopeful, developments in the interim.

Man, the State, and Race War

Kenneth Waltz, in his classic study of international relations *Man, the State, and War*, asked the age-old question about conflicts, why do they continue to occur in the face of all conceivable logic to the

*Corresponding author: James A. Mitchell, Department of Political Sciences, California State University, Northridge, USA, Tel: 8186772673; E-mail: james.mitchell@csun.edu

Received March 13, 2015; Accepted March 31, 2015; Published April 10, 2015

Citation: Mitchell JA (2015) The Assimilation of Racial Minorities into Central Eastern European Societies in the 21st Century: Central Eastern and Western Europe in Comparative Perspective. J Pol Sci Pub Aff 3: 150. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000150

Copyright: © 2015 Mitchell JA. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

contrary? Waltz looked at the problem of international conflict through the lenses of three analytic frameworks that he called “images”. He wanted to determine whether or not the source of international conflict could more likely be located in the individual, state, or international systemic image. For Waltz, the employment of these images, or levels-of-analyses, enabled him to identify variables salient to the nature of the question at hand. By employing the same variables cross-situational, Waltz believed it to be possible to determine which image provided the greatest explanatory power for why wars occur. He concluded that, despite the inability to attribute any concrete characteristics to either the nature of individuals or states, systemic safeguards had the best chance of tempering the propensity toward international conflict [2].

The Waltzian images will provide the analytical prism through which conditions attendant to this study will be filtered and refracted as well. This provides the possibility to make comparisons between the Western European experience of the past few decades, and the Central/Eastern European ones on the horizon. Unlike Waltz, who examined the individual, state, and systemic images in succession to arrive at his conclusions, the reverse course will be taken here. First the systemic circumstances attendant to the two regions will be explored. It is at that level where it appears the greatest conscious effort is being made to avert the pitfalls of the past. Following, will be an examination of the state and individual images. The view here is that the individual image is the one most fraught with uncertainty and will potentially provide the most insurmountable obstacles to social stability. Similar to Waltz’ conclusion regarding the incidence of war, the finding here is that multicultural enmity is much less likely to recur in the Central/Eastern Europe region largely because of the palliative effect of international systemic expectations attendant to the post-cold war environment.

Why all the Fuss?

The increase in the numbers of non-white populations in the cities of Western Europe in recent decades has been unmistakable. A cursory stroll through virtually any major city of the region makes that clear. At the dawn of the new millennium, 10-12% of the population of Western Europe can be categorized as falling into the visible minority category [3]. Their numbers fall within 15-40% range for the populations of Lisbon, London, Brussels, and Rotterdam [4]. This fact, in and of itself, is no cause for alarm. What have been troublesome have been the accompanying difficulties experienced by people on both sides of the demographic divide. The most obvious problems can be seen in the instances of “racist” crimes. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) reports that such instances have been steadily on the rise and have been evidenced throughout the region [5]. Even for those nations that have made an effort to report such instances their accuracy has been said to have been on the low end [4]. The EUMC finding was, “there are ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities in all member states who are vulnerable to racist crimes and discrimination”.

A detailed rendering of the data attendant to the incidence of racist crimes exceeds the bounds of this study. A few trends are instructive. The new millennium ushered in a sharp increase in reports of racist violence according to EUMC reports.

Good intentions notwithstanding, the reportage of sheer numbers to some extent sanitizes the content of the condition. Considering an actual case might put a human face on perils confronted by these visible minorities. On December 21, 2000, a German citizen Mozambican origin was brutally murdered in the city of Dessau [4]. He was stripped naked, pilloried with yells of “nigger pig” by his assailants while they

kicked him to death. Racist, neo-Nazi and xenophobic organizations have little difficulty in attracting adherents. They cover an expanse from the Atlantic to the Caucasus.

Not all of the difficulties experienced by visible minorities in Western Europe are of the blatant variety. Other, more indirect indicators have been evidenced as well. The numbers of neo-Nazi and far right extremist groups rose in France, Germany, Greece, Spain, Sweden, and Denmark in 2000s. The Golden Dawn group in Greece has been particularly virulent, training and encouraging its adherents to use violence as the preferred means of expression [6]. Gunter Verheugen, former Minister of State at the German Foreign Office and current head of the European Enlargement Commission noted “an alarming increases in racist and xenophobic tendencies in all European countries, including Germany” [5].

In its Human Rights Agenda for the European Union Year 2000 the Comite de Sages expressed concern that “within the Union large-scale discrimination persists in various forms. Racism and xenophobia are thriving” [5]. Less visible, but in many respects even more insidious, has been the lack of access visible minorities have had to equal employment opportunity and democratic rights, including the right to obtain citizenship. Unemployment rates for visible minorities in Western Europe are considerably higher than for the general population. Most of those that are employed are in the unskilled, manual or non-paid sectors.

In sum, it is fair to say that the overall relationship between visible minorities and the general population in Western Europe has been less than harmonious. The minority populations have suffered the most between the two groups. The report that came out of a meeting of the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in October 2000 captures the essence of the situation. WCAR “condemns the growth of racism and discrimination based on race, color of skin, gender, language religion, political or other opinion, national or social origins, ethnicity, birth or other ground and the persistent climate of intolerance in the region.”

The question of whether a similar or worse fate will befall minorities in the Central/Eastern Region is the concern of this study. We will attempt to identify the similarities and dissimilarities among salient variables for the international system, the states, and the individuals for the regions of Europe in question. A determination can then be made as to whether or not visible minorities ought to anticipate a similar fate in the East/Central region.

The International System

Cold war

The great migratory wave of visible minorities into Western Europe occurred between the 1960s and 1990s. The international system during that period was dominated by the cold war balance of [4] power that existed between the United States and the former Soviet Union. The United Nations (UN) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) were among the intergovernmental organizations established at the close the Second World War for the purpose of diminishing the likelihood of a return to the animosities that obtained for the interwar interregnum. Accompanying their establishment were a set of international norms and agreements that were designed to, among other things, ensure the world’s citizens inalienable human rights. Among them, those ensuring reasonable treatment for immigrant populations are salient for this discussion. Among the elements that are foundational to the *raison d’etre* for the original European Community was the assumption

of multilateral responsibility for the elimination of national intolerance and discrimination of minority peoples [1].

The foregoing facts notwithstanding, the battle against racism, xenophobia, and discrimination took a backseat to balance-of-power considerations attendant to the East-West rivalry. The dominant conceptual approach to foreign relations instituted by the United States and the Soviet Union during most of that period can be best characterized as realist. The logic of *realpolitik* meant that neither side could countenance the loss of allies to the other. Supporting compliant regimes often meant countenancing domestic social policies that departed from stated international standards. Neither the United States, nor any multilateral organization in which it wielded influence, was going to press its allies very hard on being in compliance with international human rights standards as long they were regarded as being on the right side of the bipolar divide. As indicated above, the extent to which nations were being held to international standards, varied during different periods of the cold war era. For instance, during the short-lived phase of “peaceful coexistence” that marked the *détente* period there were some pressures being brought to bear. The decade between 1969 and 1979 was one during which concern was expressed regarding the domestic social conditions among the world’s societies. For example, it was during that period that the fight against racism in South Africa was being pressed with some fervor. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 brought a close to the *détente* effort, and with it, a relaxation of pressure on superpower allies with less than acceptable records in managing relations among social groups.

Post-cold war

In successive years, beginning in 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, Germany reunified, and the Soviet Union was dissolved. The compendium of these developments was a new international system best characterized by the term “post-cold war”. The end of cold war rivalry had been eagerly anticipated in part because of the stabilizing effect it was hoped it would have on the central balance of power. Additionally, it was anticipated that opportunities for rapprochement would be presented in other realms, as well. President George Bush, the elder, was the first head of state to utter the phrase “new world order” regarding the emergent system. The essence of that view was that the triumph of the Western Bloc over the Eastern marked the triumph of democracy over totalitarianism, capitalism over communism and, multilateralism over unilateralism in the area of international relations. It was the last development that appeared to provide the greatest opportunity for an amelioration of the well-being of those suffering under the rule of governments failing to provide equality of opportunity for all. No longer have naïve about the prospect of forging a consensus supported for Wilsonian liberal ideals; instead the conceptual explanation for post-cold war behavior could be subsumed under the rubric of neorealism. The view being that nations could be expected to adhere to this new world order “regime” due to a twin sense of its legitimacy and self-interest [7].

With regard to the issue of regime expectations concerning the treatment of minority groups, multilateral expectations are made clear in the treaties that constitute them. The Maastricht Treaty of November 1993 provides the general outlines of those expectations in Article 6 of the document. It makes clear EU founding principles of liberty, democracy, and human rights. Article 13 of the Treaty details uniform standards that would be imposed among EU members and aspirants regarding the protection of minorities from discrimination [8]. The Copenhagen Council statement of the same year was more specific regarding what the EU would expect of aspiring members

from the East/Central region. It held that the treatment of minorities in those regions would be judged “according to the highest standards of international norms and criteria” [9]. 1997 was officially named the “European Year against Racism”. In that year the EU established the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) [10]. It also established a network for the compilation and dissemination of information regarding incidences of racism and xenophobia (RAXEN) [11].

In June of 2000, the European Union adopted Directive 2000/43/EC “implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin”. This so-called “Race-Directive” would provide the clearest EU statement to that date concerning the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnicity in employment, public accommodation, and other fields [10]. Of particular relevance to this discussion is the fact that, in addition to requiring that the Race Directive be articulated in national legislation for all EU member states, the Union would make it a provision of its *acquis communautaire* [4]. The “*acquis*” details the expectations needing to be met among other requirements for accession to membership in the EU. In support of the EU provisions, the Council of Europe established a European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. This body convened a European Conference against Racism in October 2000 [4].

The account above only partially details the significance of international standards to which the nations of Eastern and Central Europe have been expected to adhere for the entirety of the process of transition. The emergence of the aforementioned international systemic structure of new world order marked a departure from the preceding system in terms of the pressures that could bring to bear on governing regimes in the region. During the cold war the pressures on the superpowers, particularly in the West, to acquiesce to allies who could be regarded as less than pluralist was considerable. In the absence of those pressures, greater scrutiny could be applied to the behaviors of those judged as not meeting the international norms regarding the treatment of minorities.

Consequently, the international system can be regarded as a making a positive impact on the prospects for visible minorities in the East/Central European region, post-cold war, faring better than they had in the West in the previous period. Provisions for combating racism were enshrined in treaty agreements during the cold war. The likelihood that they would be augmented and applied increases greatly with the transition of the world from the realist to the neorealist regime.

In January 2003 the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, in partnership with the European Union, convened a conference on “The Economic and Social Aspects of Migration”. In a report entitled, “Social Integration of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities”, Anja Rudiger and Sarah Spencer presented the elements essential for any hope of the essential immigration of these migrant populations. The “building blocks” identified by the authors of the study were: assimilation, inclusion and participation, cohesion, equality and, multiculturalism. Of these building blocks, the one that has dominated the others has been that of multiculturalism, particularly since the events of September 11, 2001. Multiculturalism is the one among the building blocks that is potentially more divisive than unifying [12].

The state

The nation-states of the two regions of Europe are both similar and dissimilar in important ways as it pertains to this study. Interestingly, both their similarities and dissimilarities portend favorably for the treatment visible minorities might expect as their numbers grow in

East/Central Europe. As in the earlier case for Western Europe, the nations of the East/Central region emerged from the cataclysmic period, that of decades of totalitarian rule. The trauma from which Western Europe emerged, spanning the world wars of the twentieth century spurred a conviction similar to that of the East/Central region. There was a shared conviction that the best safeguard against the despotic behavior of the leaderships that ensnared them in their respective traumas was the inculcation of liberal-plural polities, the centerpiece being democratization. Throughout Western Europe in the years immediately succeeding World War II, democracy took root. There has been a similar development in the East/Central region. While there has been some fluidity in the degree of their commitment to free-market economic systems, all of the former totalitarian regimes have committed themselves to at least the principle of democratization. It has taken varying amounts of time for nations of the region to invest themselves in genuinely free elections. None of them has declared an intention to return to the anti-democratic behaviors of the past. Among the seminal principles lying at the core of any polity that declares it to be democratic are the dual notions of liberty and equality. Any system that purports to be democratic must provide at least a façade of guaranteeing basic civil liberties to its inhabitants and equality of opportunity. Consequently, the nations of the two European regions share a legal template against which minorities can hold governments accountable.

Another condition that nations of the two regions shared was a need for external support in order to achieve their developmental goals. Neither the Western Europeans after World War II, nor those in the East/Central region after the cold war, possessed self-sufficiency in the way of economic resources required to achieve development. Each region looked to nations and organizations for assistance in economic development that were devoted to fair treatment for minorities and that would hold them accountable for adhering to the criteria provided to them for that issue area. This would further bode well for the future of minorities in the East/Central region.

The nations of the two European regions are dissimilar in significant ways. Ironically, those dissimilarities should bode well for minority prospects, for the most part. A major difference between the two regions has to do with group identities in the two regions. The societies of Western Europe that would receive the influx in visible minorities after World War II were grounded in the ideals of classical liberalism that safeguarded the coexistence of individual and group identity alongside the national. There was no effort in Western Europe after World War II to actively abolish the primordial identities that new immigrants brought with them as they passed through the halls of entry. Indeed, while they were encouraged to assimilate the cultural norms of their newly adopted societies, it would not be done at the expense of their origins. This would particularly be evidenced as various racial, ethnic, and multicultural movements would gain momentum in the latter decades of the 20th century. The peoples of East/Central Europe had come from precisely the opposite societal ethos. Under their former communist systems the ideal was for them to subordinate their former class, racial, religious, and ethnic identities, among others, to the proletarian ideal. This meant that totalitarian societies, officially, made a concerted effort to paper over preoccupation with the kinds of majority-minority cleavages that so vexed their Western neighbors [4]. Certainly the post-cold war awakening for the societies of East/Central Europe heralded a reawakened of identities and practices that had been suppressed, particularly in the area of religion. As George Breslauer adeptly argues in his study on “Identities in Transition” in the region, the “collapse of communist systems resulted in a landscape

in which individual and collective identities not only are in transition but up for grabs.” What this means is that, unlike in the West, it is not automatically the case that a visible minority in the East/Central Europe is identified with a particular stratum of society or set of behaviors that might be regarded as less than laudable. With societies and identities in flux, opportunities exist for minorities in a sense to reinvent themselves. Consequently, it would seem that the greatest weight on the fate of majority-minority relations in East/Central Europe is on the shoulders of the individuals themselves [13].

There have been additional developments in the 21st century relative to the fate of “visible minority” migrants. While there has been a documented increase in instances of discrimination and violence against visible minorities in the 21st century, there have also been countervailing signs. While “visible minorities, refugees, asylum seekers and, the Roma, appear to suffer the brunt of abusive treatment”, many Europeans have expressed the view that their areas would welcome visible minority immigrants. Gallup polling throughout the 21st century notes both of the aforementioned trends. The tables at the end of the articles provide the relevant tables. Interestingly, the same polling has found a positive correlation between the extent to which net migration was negative and these favorable sentiments. When the opposite was the case, that net migration was more positive the mood was not nearly as hospitable [14].

Man's fate

The foregoing discussion of the salient conditions impacting the conditions that visible minorities might anticipate in the nations of East/Central Europe was by no means exhaustive. It was intended to highlight the most significant factors likely to influence future conditions. To a considerably greater degree than was the case for the nations of Western Europe, the international systemic status quo is likely to provide significant support for minority rights. International law and organization at both regional and global levels provide human rights standards against which societies of the East/Central region will be judged. It also seems that substantial opportunities will be afforded at the level of states as well for minority opportunity in East/Central Europe. There are two potential caveats to that assessment, however. The resources available to minorities in the East/Central region will be scarcer than for their counterparts in the West as they are for the populations as a whole. With Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) per capita ranging from a high of about \$ 24,478 in Slovenia to \$1500 in Moldova for 2012, the economic pie is considerably smaller in the East and competition stiffer, potentially [4].

This must inevitably be combined with that fact that the societies into which they are trying to gain entry are a lot more culturally homogenous than in the West. For Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania respectively, the percentage of people of native ethnicity is 85.3%, 94.4%, 89.9%, 97.6%, and 89.1% consequently, the “visibility” of these minorities will be greater than in the more heterogeneous West [15].

It is the view of this work that individual attitudes and behaviors among majority and minority peoples will pose the greatest threat to stability in their relationship. This is not to say that the two groups start from any *tabula rasa* ideal. The efforts of the previous totalitarian regimes notwithstanding, residual prejudices and stereotypes do abound. Anti-Semitism is part of the not too distant past for the nations of Central/Eastern and cannot be responsibly diminished. Its presence is unlikely to directly impact attitudes toward visible minorities except insofar as tolerance of it contributes to a general atmosphere of bias. More on point though is the prevailing low regard in which the Roma

population of those nations is held. Leon Volovici, in his study of anti-Semitic and anti-Roma attitudes, made the following observation:

As with the Jews during the 1930s or during the war, one can say or write anything about Gypsies without fearing criticism. The press and television constantly feed the general hostility toward Gypsies and legitimizes the popular rhetoric on the increasing Gypsy danger. The nearly unanimous public appearance of anti-Gypsy stereotypes with racist connotations has extended to other ethnic groups, especially dark-skinned foreigners. Incidents involving African or Asian students studying in Eastern Europe participating in international sports competitions have become a source of racist utterances, not only from heated sports team supporters [16].

This statement and evidence of hate groups in Scandinavia, the Baltics, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Russia, make clear that the possibility of difficulties does exist.

There is a limited extent to which either the international community or the structure of the state can penetrate the hearts and minds of individuals. To a great degree the tenor of relations among groups in East/Central Europe in future is going to be a matter of personal responsibility. Further it must be acknowledged this is shared responsibility of those in the minority as well as the majority. Visible minorities are going to need to act responsibly as newcomers in their adoptive lands just as those in the majority will need to be congenial hosts. The propensity of the darker impulses of individuals should be tempered to a greater degree by the system and the state in East/Central Europe in the 21st Century than was the case for Western Europe in the 20th. At some point it will be up to man to determine man's fate.

References

1. Khan K, Carpenter CD, Richard H (2000) Mapping Available Information on Social Exclusion and Drugs: Focusing on Minorities Across 15 EU Member States.
2. Kenneth W (1959) Man the State and War. Columbia University Press, New York
3. Lorenzo KE (1996) The Changing Face of Europe: Racism, immigration, and the coming police state.
4. *ibid.*
5. Davidson J, Symposium on Race and Ethnicity: A Global Enquiry Session on Racial and Ethnic Integration in the European Union.
6. Yiannis B (2014) Greece's Neo-Nazis Were Scarier than Anyone Imagined, Foreign Policy.
7. Stephen DK (1982) Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables. *International Organization* 36: 185-205.
8. European Union (1982) The Maastricht Treaty.
9. European Council (1993) Conclusions of the Presidency.
10. Europa Summaries of EU Legislation (1997) European Monitoring Center on Xenophobia and Racism.
11. EUMC (2000) The RAXEN Network.
12. Anja R, Sarah S (2003) Social Integration of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities.
13. Breslauer, George WB (1996) Identities in Transition: Eastern Europe and Russia after the Collapse of Communism. Victoria EB (ed.) *Identities in Transition*.
14. Nyiri Z, Cynthia E (2007) Is Europe A Good Place for Racial and Ethnic Minorities. Gallup Poll News Service.
15. World Bank Group Data (2014) GDP Per Capita.
16. Leon V (1994) Anti - Semitism in Post-Communist Europe.